



# Leadership Handouts

## Personal Development Series

Activities Resource Center  
Department of Campus Activities  
University of Houston

### Assertive Leadership Skills

Assertiveness is an integral part of effective communication. A good leader can confidently state personal and group needs in an effective manner. Knowing how and when to assert oneself can be difficult. Below are tips on assertive behavior.

#### Non-Assertive, Assertive and Aggressive Styles

Non-assertive – failing to stand up for oneself, or standing up for oneself in such an ineffectual manner that one's rights are easily violated.

Assertive – standing up for oneself in such a way that does not violate the basic rights of other people. It is a direct, honest, and appropriate expression of one's feelings and opinions.

Aggressive – standing up for oneself in such a way that the rights of the other person are violated in the process. It is an attempt to humiliate or put down the other person.

#### Tenets of Assertion

- By standing up for ourselves and communicating our needs, we gain self-respect.
- Others respect a person who can honestly, and non-confrontationally express feelings and needs.
- Relationships are damaged when we sacrifice our integrity and deny our personal feelings.
- Expressing our feelings about other people's behavior permits them to change the behavior and provides them an accurate indicator of where they stand with us.
- When we frequently sacrifice our rights, we teach others to take advantage of us.
- Personal relationships are more authentic when we share our reactions with other people and encourage others to share their reactions with us.
- By trying never to deny any request under any circumstances, we end up hurting ourselves.

#### Assertiveness Basics

- Say what you feel
- Maintain direct eye contact
- Maintain erect posture
- Speak clearly and audibly
- Do not whine or sound apologetic
- Use body language

#### Types of Assertive Behavior

1. Basic – a simple expression of standing up for one's beliefs, feelings or opinions.
2. Empathic – expressing feelings or beliefs, while relating sensitively to another person.
3. Escalating – beginning with a basic assertion and progressing your feelings and ideas if the individual is unresponsive to your expressions.
4. Confrontive – the other person's words conflict with your ideas and beliefs

#### Assertiveness

- May be confused with aggressive behavior, however, assertion does not involve hurting the other person physically or emotionally.
- Aims at equalizing the balance of power, not "winning the battle" by putting down the other person or rendering her/him helpless.



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- Allows you to express your legitimate wants, needs, feelings, and ideas and creates honest relationships with others.
- Gives other individuals a right to respond to your assertiveness with their own wants, needs, feelings, and ideas.
- May involve negotiating a new solution with another individual. Assertiveness does not imply I win/you lose.
- Concerns not only what you say but how you say it.
- Includes asking directly for something you want.
- Can be learned and maintained by constant practice.

**Three Techniques for Assertive Behavior**

Rewrite your script. Picture a time when you weren't assertive. Rewrite the scene, outlining what an appropriate assertive response would have been. See the ARC handout on conflict resolution for suggestions on appropriate scripting.

Set limits. Decide how you are willing to expend time and energy. Be clear about the limits, be firm and don't constantly back down.

Say No. Consider your reasons for saying yes (guilt, pleasing others). Give an honest and direct answer if you are unable or unwilling to follow through.

**Traits that Reduce Your Assertiveness and Leadership  
Effectiveness**

- Arbitrariness
  - Arrogance
  - Indecisiveness
  - Lack of frankness and sincerity
  - Failure to delegate responsibility
  - Failure to show appreciation or give credit
  - Failure to see another person's point of view
  - Bias; letting emotions rule
  - Failure to use gestures and facial expressions
3. Relaxation  
Slow your body down, both mentally and physically. This includes such techniques as meditation, mental imagery, and deep breathing.
  4. Physical Wellness  
Good nutrition and exercise are important and help to reduce tension.
  5. Sleep  
Sleep lets your body reenergize. Completion of dreams is also important.
  6. Rewards  
Give yourself a pat on the back for following these stress reduction techniques.

Remember the learning how to deal with stress is a very important life skill. In order to lead a healthy, happy life, you must learn to accept, define, and cope with the stress in your life. Practice is the key.

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